

## Chapter Two                      The Early Years                      1903 to 1920

Prior to 1900 Albany had been the major port for WA, but with the opening of the Inner Harbour, trade through Fremantle grew and it became the dominant port. In 1906, a set of 6" guns were installed at *Fort Arthurs Head* on the south side of the harbour mouth (near the Roundhouse). Another set was installed at *Fort Forrest* in 1908 in the area that is now the oil tanks at Northport. These guns were the sole coast defences for Fremantle until the mid-1930s. By 1909, Defence Electric Lights (DELs) were being installed to support the coast guns around Australia and Capt CH Foott arrived at Fremantle with a party to install these searchlights on North Mole and at Rous Head. At this time



***No 4 Electric Coy, Aust Engineers*** was authorized, but not formed until 1910 at Artillery Barracks, Fremantle to man these lights and it is likely that Sgt Goadby finally joined an engineer unit. The first OC was Lt H Dowson and sixteen sappers joined the unit in 1910 before the unit reached full strength of thirty in 1911 with men who enlisted for three year engagements. The unit was a militia unit with only a single man PMF cadre

while the permanent gunners maintained the lights.

In 1907, provision was made in various planning documents for a unit of field engineers to be raised in WA which was to be known as ***No 7 Half Coy (Fd)*** but no action was taken to raise the unit. By 1910 this theoretical unit had been renamed ***No 4 Half Coy (Fd)*** and in the 1910/11 Defence Budget, provision was made to raise the unit which was now to be called ***No 6 Half Coy (Fd)***. Applications were called in the local press in early 1911 with the first sappers enrolled on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1911. The unit was again renamed as ***No 4 (Half) Fd Coy*** on 31<sup>st</sup> March and training commenced at the Francis Street Drill Hall when Lt J Pidgeon (**Box 02**) was transferred from Aust Intelligence Corps as OC on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. The initial establishment was for two officers and 33 other ranks.

The first camp of continuous training was in April 1911 at Tammin (180 kms east of Perth) and as Lt Pidgeon was a senior railway engineer, they travelled by train. The 2ic was Lt WD Evans and 16 other ranks attended the camp, including men like Spr FDA Bowra and Spr FW Stradwick who were later to feature in the exploits of the AIF at Gallipoli and in France. The unit held weekly parades at Francis Street with weekend bivouacs at Karrakatta, the Remount Depot at

Guildford or at the Swanbourne Rifle Range. The second annual camp was held under canvas at Rockingham in April 1912 after arriving by steamer from Fremantle. The two officers and 27 men were now divided into two sections for training. The OC's Order Book covering the period 1911 to 1921 is part of the *RAE Assoc Archive* and is held at Karrakatta by *13 Fd Sqn*.

Insert Box 02 around here

In 1911 the Government implemented the recommendations of a review by General Kitchener and commenced the Universal Service Scheme which would see all young men serve in the army, progressing through the Junior Cadets (age 12 to 14), Senior Cadets (age 14 to 18) then the Citizen Forces (age 18 to 26). All units were reorganized and the field companies across Australia were renumbered with *No 4 (Half) Fd Coy* becoming **13<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Fd Coy)** from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1912 when they moved to Guildford.



The Universal Trainees joined the unit on 1<sup>st</sup> July of the year they turned 18 and were required to attend eight days of home training and a 17 day annual camp, which was longer than the training period required of the voluntary enlisted personnel, causing some administrative issues. Plans for the 1913 camp to be at Tammin were cancelled and they instead trained at Guildford, including the erection of a

suspension bridge which remained in use until the 1980s. In June 1913, *13<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Fd Coy)* were renamed **13 Fd Coy (Engineers)**. The intakes for 1912 and 1913 totalled sixty men and on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1914 a further 42 men joined the unit, but by then the first of the 1911 voluntary enlistments had reached the end of their three years and many left. Some of these early volunteers remained as they reached more senior ranks. The initial CSM had been HJ Shepherd, a permanent army soldier, but Sgt Bowra was promoted into the role in March 1912. When he was commissioned later that year, CSM Stradwick took the role before he left for the reserves in April 1914, allowing Sgt JHH Napier (**Box 03**) to be the first Universal Trainee to become CSM.

Insert Box 03 around here

In the 1912 reorganization, *No 4 Elect Coy* was renamed **35<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Electric Coy)** and was to receive eight recruits from the quota of those born in 1894 to add to the 30 volunteer members. In June 1913 the unit was renamed

**35 Frt Coy (Engineers).** The compulsory trainees were not well received by the volunteers, many of whom left, so after the 1913 intake of 25 men from the 1895 quota and 41 men from 1896 quota in 1914, the number of volunteers left in the unit had dropped to five. In August 1914 when Great Britain declared war on Germany and her allies, the strong ties with the 'Mother Country' ensured that Australia followed suite. As soon as Australia went to war, the militiamen of 35 Frt Coy was called out to support the coast gunners at *Fort Arthur Head* and *Fort Forrest*. For the rest of 1914 the coast guns and searchlights were manned while the German cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* roamed the Pacific but the capture of Rabaul (NG) by the AN&MEF in September eased the concerns. The landing force at Rabaul included only one sapper, the now Lt Goadby.

The Defence Act prevented the militiamen in the Australian Army from serving overseas, so the Government announced the raising of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) from volunteers for overseas service. The raising of engineer units in WA and their activities in the four years of the Great War are covered in Chapter 3. As the Universal Trainees in militia units still had obligations under the legislation, the sappers who wanted to join the AIF were seconded from their unit to the new force for the duration. Later when they were discharged from the AIF they were returned to their militia unit and taken back on strength. This process also applied to those killed in action with the AIF, the unit was notified, the member was brought back on strength and then struck off strength by being 'transferred' to their home area. Initially the sappers from 35 Frt Coy, like the coast gunners, were not permitted to join the AIF as they were required to remain at their post, or be ready to man their lights on callout. However by mid-1915 the threat of German raiders had receded, so a proportion were allowed to enlist in the AIF.



Over the period of the war, 95 sappers from 13 Fd Coy were seconded to the AIF along with 46 from 35 Frt Coy and most went into infantry battalions rather than field engineer units. Fourteen of the 13 Fd Coy sappers and seven of those from 35 Frt Coy lost their lives in Europe and they are listed on the Honour Roll at the end of Chapter Three. While training on North Mole at Fremantle, Spr E Prince was drowned on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1915 and although he was on active duty at the time, he is not commemorated on the Roll of Honour at the Aust War Memorial as his unit was not liable for overseas service.

Although the training obligations of the militia continued during the war, and registration had proceeded on normal lines, most units did not undertake much training. Only the latest four intakes were required to parade, although the others still needed to attend the annual muster parade. The intake in July 1915 from the 1897 Quota was reduced, with only 16 joining *13 Fd Coy*, although another 16 joined the smaller *35 Frt Coy* as they still had an active role to play. The coast defences, and searchlights were mobilized for two months from February 1916 when German raiders were thought to be in the area, and again for two weeks in May 1918.

Maj Pidgeon left to lead *6 Fd Coy AIF* in September 1915, along with Lt Stradwick who commanded the WA raised *3 Sec*, so Lt AE Roberts became acting OC of *13 Fd Coy*. Training for all militia units and the senior cadets was suspended from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1915, initially for three months. The training program for the first six months of 1916 was prepared but in January, training was again suspended. However the unit resolved to continue with the program on a voluntary basis and attendance was described as ‘reasonable’. Lt ECW Roeder took over as OC from January 1916. Although many of the overnight training periods for *13 Fd Coy* were held at Guildford, the unit continued to be based at Francis Street Drill Hall until late 1916 when they took over offices at Guildford. Around the same time *35 Frt Coy* moved from Artillery Barracks, Fremantle to the Claremont Drill Hall, although they continued most of their training at the searchlight positions. The intake from the 1898 Quota in July 1916 was increased but they only attended a single administrative parade before attending the annual camp at Guildford in October. Similarly the July 1917 intake of 44 from the 1899 Quota had minimal home training before their first annual camp in March 1918.

When sappers returned home from France, either wounded or sick, they re-joined their unit when fit to continue serving, such as Lt Napier who re-joined (minus a leg) in November 1916. Having returned to Australia to tend to his ailing wife, Maj Pidgeon re-assumed command of *13 Fd Coy* on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1917. Following the Armistice in November 1918, the AIF sappers returned home in batches and reported back to their unit. Those whose Universal Service training obligations had been completed were then discharged, while the others were to attend the muster parade. Compulsory training re-commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1920 for the 1902 quota, with 65 joining *13 Fd Coy* and 26 joining *35 Frt Coy*. These 1902 quota men attended a recruit camp and along with the 1901, 1900, 1899 quota men they were required to attend the annual camp and weekly parades. The three older quotas just had to attend the annual muster parade.

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**Box 02**

**Keeping it in the Family,  
The Pidgeons of 13 Field Company**

John Pidgeon was born in County Kildare, Ireland on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1859 and trained as an engineering draughtsman. He left Ireland in 1883 for South Africa, working on the railways as an assistant engineer, before moving to WA in 1886. He was an assistant engineer on the Albany to Beverley line and then the Geraldton to Mullewa line, before becoming District Engineer in Albany, then Perth. He joined the Aust Intelligence Corps in January 1909 and was tasked in early 1911 with raising *No 4 (Half) Fd Coy* of which Lt Pidgeon became the OC on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. He was promoted to Captain in July and Major in December. The unit had their first camp at Tammin in April after travelling by train. In the Kitchener Reforms, the unit became *13<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Fd Coy)* in July 1912, renamed *13 Fd Coy* in June 1913. When *6 Fd Coy AIF* was raised in September 1915, Maj Pidgeon was appointed as OC. They left for the Middle East in November and trained with *6 Inf Bde* on the Suez Canal, before leaving for France in March 1916. The company worked in the area south of Armentieres until July when *2 Inf Div* attacked towards Pozieres. In August, Maj Pidgeon was transferred as OC of *Aust Engineer Trng Depot* in Dorset. However news that his wife was sick at home with small children caused him to seek a discharge and he returned to Perth in December 1916. Here he returned to work at WAGR and then to command of *13 Fd Coy* in April 1917. He retired as OC in August 1920 at age 61 and died suddenly in November.



His oldest son, Ivan Farquhar William began his universal training in *35 Frt Coy* in July 1912 as part of the 1894 quota, but transferred into *13 Fd Coy* in January 1913 to join his father. He was promoted to L/Cpl in June 1914 and 2<sup>nd</sup>Cpl in April 1915. He joined *3 Sec, 6 Fd Coy* as a sapper under Lt Stradwick in September, leaving for the Middle East in November. *6 Fd Coy* trained with their brigade on the Suez Canal where Spr Pidgeon regained his L/Cpl strip in January 1916 and was promoted 2<sup>nd</sup>Cpl in March when the unit left for France. He was sent to the *Officers Trng School* in Wales in July and commissioned as 2<sup>nd</sup>Lt in October. He was posted to *5 Fd Coy* in January 1917 and joined them at Ribemont. He was promoted to Lt in April but during an attack on the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt on 4 May 1917 he was killed in action.

John Ashe Pidgeon was at UWA studying engineering when he joined *13 Fd Coy* in July 1916 as part of the 1898 quota. As a WAGR cadet engineer his studies kept him out of the AIF, but he was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup>Cpl in November 1917 and Sgt in February 1919. Few details are available for the period between 1921 and 1939, except that he joined Midland Railway Company in 1929 and he probably remained in *13 Fd Coy*, or re-joined in the mid 1930's. He was commissioned in September 1939 within *13 Fd Coy* and promoted to Capt in January 1941 before being mobilized in September. In April 1942 he was tasked to raise *7 Bomb Disposal Coy* and was promoted to Major in May. After a BD course at SME, Maj Pidgeon was transferred to Townsville as OC of *41 DCRE (Wks)* in March 1943. In this role he supervised all army works projects in the Townsville region for the rest of the war. In August 1945 he returned to Perth to *68 DCRE (Wks)* and briefly acted as CRE

before being discharged in December. He returned to the Midland Railway, retiring in 1963 and died in 1965.



Terence Knight Pidgeon was 39 and working as a Civil Engineering Draughtsman with WAGR when he enlisted in January 1942. After recruit training he was posted to 22 *Army Fd Coy*, until he transferred to 13 *Fd Coy* at Dandaragan in July. As a Draughtsman he was seconded to CRE 4 *Inf Div*, but re-joined his unit before they left for NT in March 1943. He spent most of his time on drafting duties in *CoyHQ* and embarked for New Britain in December 1944. After the Japanese surrender he moved to Rabaul with *CoyHQ* and as he was an early enlistee, had a high priority for discharge. He embarked for home in September, to be

demobilized in October 1945. He returned to work at WAGR, retiring in 1967 and died in 1987.

Dermot Augustus Pidgeon (Paddy) was a 33 year old dairy farmer near Kojonup when he went to enlist in July 1941. However he was classified as Medical Class IIA (poor eyesight) and was allocated as a reinforcement for 5 *Grn Bde* which was defending the port of Fremantle. After training in 13 *Trng Bn* he joined 10 *Grn Bn* on Rottnest Island. He joined the AIF in August 1943, transferring to 44 *Inf Bn* in January 1944 before they left for Kairi (Qld) in February. That unit disbanded in August and he was reallocated to join 13 *Fd Coy* in NT. He arrived at Darwin in time to leave with the unit for Jacquinot Bay in November. He became ill in September 1945 and was evacuated through a chain of hospitals, reaching Perth in October. After recovering he was discharged in March 1946. Dermot Pidgeon returned to farming in the Kojonup district after discharge and died in 1960.

A third generation of Pidgeons joined the Army when Jonathon Ashe Pidgeon (Jnr) (born in 1934) was called up for National Service in January 1955. After training in 17 *NS Trng Bn* he was allocated to *WAUR* while he studied Architecture. He completed his compulsory training in May 1957 and was discharged in 1960. He worked in Perth as an Architect and died in 2010.

The Pidgeon family have a long and proud association with 13 *Fd Sqn* with four of the five sons of the first OC all serving with the unit in two World Wars with one paying the supreme sacrifice.

Photo caption, to be inserted.

Dermot, John Ashe and Terrance Pidgeon all followed their father into 13 *Fd Coy*.



**Box 03**

**Lt Col John Howard Hastings NAPIER OBE ED**  
***CRE W Comd, CRE WA L of C Area, 10 CRE (Wks)***



Born 18<sup>th</sup> April 1894 in Perth (WA), John Napier was educated at Claremont State School and was working as a Cadet Mechanical Engineer at the Midland Locomotive Workshops when he was called up as a Universal Trainee as part of the 1894 Quota in July 1912. He was allocated to **13 Fd Coy** with the regimental number 43 and promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Cpl in March 1913. Promotion continued when he became a Sgt in May 1914. When CSM Stradwick left for the Reserve List he became Acting CSM in June 1914.

Napier joined the AIF at Blackboy Hill in September 1914 where he was appointed 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt to command *3 Sec* of **3 Fd Coy**. They left for Egypt in November and Napier was with his section when they came under fire at El Kantara in February 1915. He landed at Gallipoli on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915 where he suffered a gunshot wound to his left knee on 16<sup>th</sup> May. He was evacuated, and after his lower leg was amputated, left for UK by hospital ship. He returned to WA later that month and was discharged from the AIF in May 1916, returning briefly to **13 Fd Coy** before joining the Reserve of Officers.

John Napier re-joined WAGR when he recovered from his wound and undertook training as an Electrical Engineer, reaching senior positions in the division that operated the tramway system around Perth. In September 1927 he returned to part time duty with **13 Fd Coy** under Maj Baxter-Cox and was promoted to Capt in May 1932. Napier was seconded to the engineer staff at **HQ W Comd** in May 1939 and with war clouds developing over Europe, he was promoted to Major in August and called up for war planning purposes in the Engineer Stores Service in September. He transferred to the Works Service in March 1940 and was appointed Assistant Director of Engineer Services in May 1941. He was promoted to Lt Col in August and appointed **CRE W Comd** in September. In this role he controlled the works and engineer stores services as well as having supervising role for the field engineer units. In December, Napier completed a Senior Officers Course and in January 1942 he was awarded an OBE.

When *4 Inf Div* arrived in WA in April 1942, their CRE, Lt Col Lawrence took over the field units and he subsequently became *CE 3 Aust Corps*. Engineer Services initially remained outside the control of *CE 3 Aust Corps* and this led to considerable friction between the engineer branches throughout 1942. *CRE W Comd* became **CRE WA L of C Area** in May and then **10 CRE (Wks)** in August with Napier continuing in control of all non-operational works in WA. In January 1943, Napier exchanged roles with Lt Col Tolley to take over **9 CRE (Wks)** at Adelaide which controlled all works in SA. When *9 CRE (Wks)* was to transfer to a more active area, Napier's artificial leg meant that he could not accompany them. He relinquished his post in May 1944 and joined the Retired List. Napier returned to his previous role with WA Gov Tramways & Ferries. He retired in 1959 as General Manager and passed away in 1987.